



Bethesda Community

GARDEN CLUB

"Ninety-nine Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes"

www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org

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Member of
The National Capital Area
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All About Soil and Composting

From Ob-Gyn to FDA to Environmental Horticulture, **Lesley Ann Furlong** has been working in fields about caring for and improving people's lives and their surroundings. A native of Canada and an American citizen since 1991, Lesley spent 18 years as a gynecologist before she took a position with the FDA, from where retired shortly before the pandemic.

A 30-year resident of Montgomery County, Lesley has always loved gardening and now that she has more time to devote to it she's become a Master Gardener. Before she did, she studied Environmental Horticulture at Montgomery College and she has an abiding interest in soil composition and how gardeners can improve it. Feeling she had worthwhile information to share, she joined the Master Gardeners Speakers' Bureau. Today she will explain what she knows about soil testing, soil problems, soil amendments, composting, soils for raised beds and pots among other topics. Don't miss this opportunity to hear Lesley's tips on best practices for improving your soil so you can achieve the gardening results you hope for!

The meeting will take place on **March 22** at St. Mark Presbyterian Church, 10701 Old Georgetown Road, North Bethesda. It will begin at 10:30, but you're welcome to come at 10 to mix and mingle. A hot lunch will be served.

Jane Malish



Golden ragwort (*Packera aurea*) is a native alternative to nonnative invasive Garlic mustard. Learn more in Carole Ottesen's Horticultural Notes on p. 5.

2023-24 MEMBERSHIP DUES REMINDER - DUE DATE IS APRIL 1ST

Membership dues are \$45.00 – payable to **Bethesda Community Garden Club**

Payable by Check – Mail to: **BCGC**
c/o Margy Tritschler
P.O. Box 25
Garrett Park, MD 20896

Payable Online – go to our website
<http://bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org/>

Click **JOIN**
Click **PAY DUES**
Click **SHOP NOW**
Click **JOIN/RENEW**
Click **CONTINUE TO CART** (cart is in top right-hand corner and should have a "1" in it)
Complete your transaction.

Please note that if you have more than "1" in your cart, use the trash can icon to the right to delete and enter only 1 purchase of a membership.

FYI -If you are wondering what your membership dues covers, here is a general breakdown:

Membership in the National Garden Club	\$ 8.00
Printing of the annual Yearbook	\$ 8.00
Honoraria for speakers	\$ 8.00
Rental of meeting room	\$16.00
Administration (website, bank fees & supplies)	<u>\$ 5.00</u>
	\$45.00

All other expenses of the club are related to our community service at the libraries and our annual donations to horticultural and environmental concerns. Our annual plant sale proceeds typically cover and exceed these discretionary expenditures.

Plant Sale News

Mark your calendar for the BCGC Plant Sale on **May 11**, held at the Farm Women's Market in downtown Bethesda.

The sale is open to the public. It's the club's biggest event and our only fundraiser. Enthusiastic buyers come early and plants sell out quickly.

The more plants we have to sell, the better.

How can you support the Plant Sale?

The best way is to donate excess plants from your own garden. When you thin or divide your overgrown plants this spring, please pot and donate your surplus.

Plant Sale Tips will arrive regularly in email blasts. Closer to the Plant Sale date, sign up to volunteer to help with the sale.

Digging and potting your plants for the sale

Plants can be potted as soon as new leafy growth pokes through leaves and mulch. Plants that emerge early can be divided and potted NOW for the May sale. *All plants* are best potted by mid-April, so they look healthy and full when sold.

Have your pots, soil, and plant labels ready when you do regular spring maintenance. Pick up pots and plant labels at the homes of Barbara Collier,

Plants from teardowns and neighbors

We do plant rescues! Do you know of a future teardown that has a garden? Contact us, as we possibly can arrange to rescue plants from the garden for the Plant Sale before the demolition starts. If you have a neighbor who would be willing to share excess plants, contact us.

Susan Lass, and Judy Termini. Please contact them before showing up in person. We will sell plants in three pot sizes: medium (6-8 inches diameter); large (9-12 inches) and "shrub" (larger than 12 inches).

- Water the plant to be dug the night before.
- Dig your plant by removing the full root ball.
- Look at the foliage and root ball to determine what size pot to use. One full pot is better than two skimpy pots.
- Pot the plant by placing some leaves in the bottom of the pot. Then cover with a little soil. To minimize transplant shock, leave the root ball as intact as possible. Place the plant at the same soil height as it was growing in the ground. Fill the sides of the pot with soil and press down.
- Water well and keep the plant in the shade for the first few days after potting.
- Label each plant with its botanical and common names, flower color and light requirements, as shown in the photo. If you know the plant is native, add that to the label.

Would you like more help?

Many members have beautiful gardens and would like to donate plants. If you find digging and potting physically challenging, then volunteers may be able to help you. Or perhaps you're a newer member in need of plant ID or a digging and dividing demo. Contact us as soon as possible to get on our schedule.

Questions? Contact Judy Termini (judytermini@gmail.com) or Elaine Hope (paris71197@gmail.com)

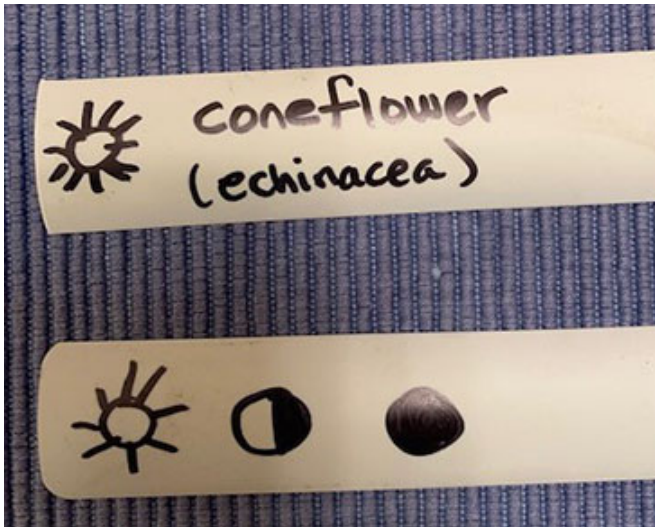
Which plants to donate?

Pretty much everything, even plants that spread too well in your garden or that you may consider too run-of-the-mill.

We *cannot* accept:

- Nonnative invasive plants like English ivy, creeping euonymus, barberry, common daylily, pachysandra and vinca minor. Aggressive *native* plants are fine to donate.
- Plant cultivars that are still under patent protection. It is illegal to resell them.
- Bulbs, except if they are flowering at the time of the sale.
- Unidentified plants.

If you don't know what it is or if it's a good candidate for donation, ask us!



Top: Plant label example

Bottom: Symbols for lighting requirements.

Annual Picnic Is Back on Track

On June 7, for the first time since 2019, BCGC will resume its annual picnic tradition of touring a garden and enjoying a catered lunch. This year the garden is Meadowlark Botanical Gardens in Vienna, VA (<https://www.novaparks.com/parks/meadowlark-botanical-gardens>). The Picnic Committee (Suzanne Shwetz, Kathy Benjamin and Suzanne Grefsheim) has scheduled

guided tours, but you will also be able to explore on your own, if you prefer.

Meadowlark Botanical Gardens ticks all our required boxes – a wonderful selection of conservation gardens to encourage the use of native trees and plants; a covered pavilion for lunch to protect us from sun and rain; and bathrooms close at hand. Admission to the Garden is included for all those attending.

More information about how to sign up, the cost for attending, and directions to get there will be available in April. In the meantime, mark your calendar (June 7) and get ready for a special experience.

Environmental Concerns

Barbara Collier

Spring Bulbs Sproinging

Has anyone else been blown away by the bulb display this late winter and spring? I have been struck by the lushness of this year's flowers. Whether it's more to do with last spring's providing the right conditions for creating this year's flowers, or this spring's odd mixture of mild and chilly weather, it seems that we have been enjoying an unusually rich spring. Especially if you (and your garden) are of a certain age and invested in lots of spring bulbs many years ago, I trust they are now happily naturalized and making a brave show.

Wandering the garden and observing the unfolding of the snowdrops, crocuses, daffodils, and others as they take the stage, I notice things I had not observed before. For instance, the snowdrops in my yard that are under trees came out earlier than those in the open a few feet away. I would have thought the reverse would be more likely. Maybe the little bit of shelter was encouraging to earlier bloom?

It also seems like this year's daffodils are lusher than I would have expected, including in areas where it had seemed they were petering out. Even what I call the "crap daffodils" are looking better than usual (these are double-flowering daffodils that were here in March 1982 when we

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Crap daffodils

moved in, and are highly susceptible to bud blast). I keep intending to dig them up and let the county compost them (since when I try composting them, they just sprout). The dozens of old overgrown daffodils edging the property line, which basically haven't ever bloomed, this year sport a bloom or two right at the edges.

It is pleasing to see that insects are starting to visit these early bloomers; the other day I saw a small bumblebee visiting newly open clumps of *Puschkinia*. Bees do visit many of the imported bulb species, but daffodils are rarely visited by pollinators: pure eye candy, I'm afraid.

So as ecologically minded gardeners, should we be disturbed that so many of the earliest flowers (both the cultivated and the wild) are nonnative? What about the goal of creating habitat for native insects and birds in the garden?

It's a balancing act. As with any nonnative, the gardener can decide whether a given bulb is sufficiently well-behaved and attractive to keep. In the case of *Ipheion uniflorum* (starflower), for instance, my husband declared war on it when he saw it taking over the front yard where he was encouraging the spread of spring beauties.

In my case, I should probably dig up my undesirable and nonblooming daffodils, just as I should finish removing nonnative pachysandra, because these really are taking up space where a native plant would provide more benefits. If I do so, I need to be able to fill the holes left behind, or weeds and invasives will move in to fill the gaps.

And lovely as our native spring flowers are, most of them appear much later than the earliest gar-

den bulbs, not to mention the hellebores, which can start blooming as early as December. Must we feel twinges of guilt when enjoying the pleasures of early spring blooms, just because so many of them are not native to our region? Do we need to start digging up these old friends?

And so the realistic, wishy-washy answer, as usual, is "it depends." Details matter: where your garden is in relation to natural areas, the relative percentage of natives and nonnatives, the particular plants and their spreading qualities, storm water management, etc. Being a purist in an urban or suburban area is probably impractical (or even impossible). A well-behaved nonnative in the right place can provide more ecological services than a native plant that is simply unable to thrive in a particular environment. On the other hand, if you avoid pesticides and minimize fertilizer use (especially artificial fertilizers), and you strive for biodiversity in plant types and forms and use sustainable practices, you can be an ecological gardener and still enjoy your spring bulbs.



Eye candy

Photos by Barbara Collier

HORTICULTURAL NOTES

Garlic Mustard

Carole Ottesen

It's been called a lot of things: Jack-in-the-Bush, Garlicwort, Hedge Garlic, Mustard Root, Poor Man's Mustard, Sauce-Along, and, most commonly, Garlic Mustard (as well as some extremely impolite terms by those who seek to eradicate it).

Brought over from Europe in the 18th Century, garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) was eaten as a green and used as an antiseptic (when mixed with wine or vinegar) to treat ailments ranging from bronchitis to gangrene. In the intervening centuries, garlic mustard has spread all over the United States and into Canada.



Photos: The Nature Conservancy

Opponents of garlic mustard rightly condemn it as a very aggressive invasive plant, a biennial that spreads by producing hundreds of seeds in its second year. To make matters worse, it is also allelopathic, deterring the growth of neighboring plants and tree seedlings. And it tricks the West Virginia white butterfly (*Pieris virginianensis*) into laying her eggs on its toxic leaves instead of on the nutrient-rich leaves of the native toothwort, (*Dentaria*).

If you find garlic mustard in your garden and don't plan to eat it, pull the entire plant out of the

ground, making sure you have all of the root. This is easiest done early in its first year from seed. A second, slower method is to pick off the second-year flowers before they form seeds. Or, you can plant vigorous native such Virginia bluebells, celandine poppies, ostrich fern or *Packera aurea* to outcompete them.



Left: Virginia bluebells;
Below: *Packera aurea*



Photos by Carole Ottesen

Below:
Celandine poppy



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In spite of its reputation, garlic mustard has enthusiastic proponents who find it as nutritious as it is aggressive and invasive. This hated and loved member of the mustards (a family that includes cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, brussels sprouts, mustard and watercress), contains abundant trace minerals, more Vitamin A than spinach and more Vitamin C than oranges. Those in favor of adding it to their menus, say it is excellent for controlling weight, improving heart health, strengthening the immune system, lowering cholesterol, and maybe preventing cancer.

Of course, to procure these benefits, you have to eat it.

A caveat: the name “garlic mustard” describes its flavor — not everyone’s favorite. However, it is tastier in combination with other ingredients. The easiest way of using it is to chop the leaves and toss them into soups and stews, onto a salad, or mix them into mashed potatoes or rice.

Aficionados compare the stems of garlic mustard to asparagus. They break off the stiff ends as with asparagus and cook the straight shoots until tender. Others make hummus by blending the leaves with cooked chick peas, tahini, lemon juice, and olive oil.

Whether you love it, tolerate it, or despise it, garlic mustard is pretty much everywhere in great abundance. Eating it seems a just and delicious way to turn an invasive into an indulgence.